SŪRAH 68

Al-Qalam

(The Pen)

Prologue

Time of Revelation

It is practically impossible to date the revelation of this *sūrah*, and this applies to its opening as well as to the *sūrah* as a whole. Nor is it possible to say for certain that its opening was revealed first and the rest after the lapse of some time. We cannot even say that this was more probable, because the opening and the ending of the *sūrah* tackle the same point, namely, the unbelievers' rude claims about the Prophet, denouncing him as a madman.

There are many reports that suggest that this was the second *sūrah* to be revealed after *Sūrah* 96. Where different editions of the Qur'ān mention an order of revelation, they all suggest that this is the second *sūrah*. Yet the style of the *sūrah*, the way it tackles its subject matter and its drift point to something else. In fact, these aspects almost confirm that it was revealed sometime after the call to Islam went public. It is well known that for three years the Prophet addressed his message to people privately, on an individual basis. In other words, this *sūrah* was most probably revealed during that time, when the Quraysh was determinedly opposed to the new message of Islam, resorting to all means to prevent it, including levelling defamatory allegations against the Prophet.

By way of response, the Qur'ān began to denounce such tactics, repelling unfounded allegations and issuing threats and warnings of the type this *sūrah* includes.

As we have said, it has been suggested that only the opening of the *sūrah* was revealed early on, soon after the first revelation of *Sūrah* 96. It is further suggested that the negation of any madness attributed to the Prophet, which occurs in the opening, "*you are not, by your Lord's grace, a madman,*" was in order to calm his own fears about whether such revelations were signs of madness. This is again unlikely, because the reports mentioning any such fears the Prophet may have had are exceedingly lacking in authenticity. Moreover, the way the *sūrah* is built as a single whole makes it clear that this negation is meant to refute the allegation mentioned at its conclusion: "*The unbelievers well-nigh trip you up with their eyes when they hear this reminder. They say, 'He is surely mad.'*" (Verse 51) It is this allegation that is negated at the *sūrah*'s very outset. This is clearly understood when we read all the *sūrah* and appreciate how closely interlinked it is throughout.

Some reports also suggest that certain passages, specifically verses 17–23 and 42–52, were revealed in Madīnah. The first of these passages mentions the test endured by the owners of the garden, and the second refers to the Prophet Jonah. Again, we believe this not to be the case. Instead, we suggest that the whole *sūrah* was revealed in Makkah, because its style is very much Makkan. Indeed, this is more likely, considering the style, the features and the overall unity of the *sūrah*.

Our own stance, therefore, is that the *sūrah* was not the second to be revealed, but rather that its revelation took place after the lapse of some considerable time after the start of the Prophet's mission. It was certainly after the divine instruction was given to the Prophet to "*warn your nearest kindred,*" (26: 214), and after the revelation of a substantial portion of the Qur'ān speaking about earlier communities. Such reports have been described by some unbelievers as 'fables of the ancients'. It was clearly revealed then at a time when the Quraysh had already been called upon to accept Islam and whence it started its resistance to the call. Indeed, so determined had it become in its opposition at this point that it did not hesitate to level false allegations against the

Prophet and his mission. It is such opposition that necessitated the very strong denunciation the *sūrah* makes of the unbelievers and the strong warnings it issues both early on and towards its end. Such timing of its revelation is also confirmed by the last image it portrays: "*The unbelievers well-nigh trip you up with their eyes when they hear this reminder. They say, 'He is surely mad.'*" (Verse 51) This is an image of a public address calling on large groups of people to accept the message. Such gatherings most certainly did not take place during the early years of the Islamic message. Indeed, the first such public address was only made three years after the Prophet began to receive Qur'ānic revelations.

The *sūrah* refers to some of the offers the unbelievers made to the Prophet, suggesting a compromise over the central issue in dispute, namely that of faith. It says: "*They would love that you compromise with them, so that they will also compromise.*" (Verse 9) Needless to say, such an offer would not have been made at a time when the message was only advocated in private, presented to a few individuals. In such circumstances, it would not have been felt to represent any danger. It is more likely that such offers would only have been made later, when the message advocated itself in public and when the unbelievers realized its far-reaching significance.

We see how several indications confirm that the *sūrah* was not revealed in the very early days of the Islamic message, and that at least three years had passed before its revelation. It is highly unlikely that no Qur'ānic revelations were made during these three years. On the contrary, it is much more likely that many *sūrahs* and passages were revealed in the intervening period, presenting the Islamic faith without strongly denouncing the unbelievers in the way we find in this *sūrah*. Having said all this, however, one can still not say that this *sūrah*, as well as *Sūrahs* 73 and 74, were revealed late into the Islamic period.

A Wide Gulf

The tree of the Islamic faith, in its real, clean and pure form, was being planted on earth. It was totally unfamiliar to the prevailing state of ignorance, or *jāhiliyyah*, not only in the Arabian Peninsula but throughout the globe. Indeed there was a great gulf between it and the

deviant and colourless form of the Abrahamic faith, mixed with local superstitions, which the Arab idolaters upheld. What Muḥammad (peace be upon him) advocated was a clear, straightforward, simple, yet comprehensive and profound faith that was fully in line with the original pure faith preached by Abraham, but to a standard of perfection that fits its being the last message to mankind, addressing them in their stage of maturity and remaining intact to the end of time. Take, for example, the notion of multiple deities that assigns partners to God: in this respect, the Arabs worshipped angels, statues, the *jinn* and spirits. Their beliefs were a medley of corrupt and hollow notions. Compare these with the noble picture the Qur'ān paints of God and His majestic power that takes care of every creature. The gulf between the two is immense.

Similarly wide is the gulf between the class system that prevailed in Arabia, the clerical nature of its religion and the monopoly of privileges, such as custodianship of the Ka'bah, on the one hand and the equality of all people preached by Islam and every individual's direct relation with God as explained in the Qur'ān on the other. Likewise, the morality advocated by the Prophet Muḥammad was a world apart from the values that prevailed in Arabia's *jāhiliyyah* society.

This great gulf between the new faith and the Quraysh's beliefs, values and practices was sufficient to bring about direct conflict between the two camps. There were, however, other factors which perhaps were, to the Quraysh, more serious than the issue of faith. There were, for example, social factors, some of which prompted them to suggest what is reported in the Qur'ān: "*They also say, 'Why was not this Qur'ān revealed to some great man of the two cities?'*" (43: 31) The two cities mentioned here are Makkah and Ṭā'if. Despite the fact that the Prophet was a descendent of the noblest family in the Quraysh, the very fact that he was not the chief of his clan made it very difficult for their chiefs to accept his leadership. In that social environment, position in one's clan was of paramount importance.

Family factors also played their part. We see such significance in the fact that 'Amr ibn Hishām, better known as Abū Jahl, stubbornly refused to accept the truth of the Islamic message, despite his being certain of it, because the Prophet preaching it belonged to the 'Abd Manāf clan. This is recounted in the story of Abū Jahl, Abū Sufyān and al-Akhnas ibn

Sharīq who each went out individually, on three consecutive nights, to listen to the Qur'ān being recited by the Prophet. Every morning, they met on their way back home and started blaming each other, pledging that they would never do this again, lest their actions encourage others to listen to the Qur'ān. When al-Akhnas asked Abū Jahl what he thought of what he heard Muḥammad reciting, the latter answered: "We have competed with the clan of 'Abd Manāf for honours: they fed the poor, and we did the same; they provided generous support to those who needed it and we did the same. When we were together on the same level, like two racehorses running neck and neck, they said that one of their number was a Prophet receiving revelations from on high! When can we attain such an honour? By God, we shall never believe in him."[1]

There were also other interests and psychological factors determined to uproot this new tree before it could firmly establish its roots and stretch forth its branches. Such efforts were particularly heightened once the new message had moved on from private and individual advocacy to the open, public stage, outlining the essential features of the new faith, Islam. The Qur'ān spoke in clear terms, showing the absurdity of polytheism and its deviant concepts and traditions.

His position as a Prophet receiving revelations from on high notwithstanding, Muḥammad was a man who experienced normal human feelings. He was at the receiving end of such determined opposition that culminated in an all out fight against him, his message and the small band of his followers. He and his Companions could not help but hear the false allegations the unbelievers levelled at him. "*They say, 'He is surely mad.'*" (Verse 51) This was but one of the many types of ridicule they levelled on him, as is reported in the Qur'ān. Such ridicule, added to the abuse and persecution many of his followers suffered at the hands of their own relatives and clansmen, pained Muḥammad, God's Messenger, greatly.

We see in Makkan *sūrahs* how God bestows His abundant care on His Messenger and this small group of followers, consoling and commending him and those who accepted his message. In this respect, God gives

1. Ibn Hishām, *Al-Sīrah al-Nabawiyyah*, Dar al-Qalam, Beirut, Vol. 1, pp. 337–338. Also, Adil Salahi (2002), *Muhammad: Man and Prophet*, Leicester, The Islamic Foundation, pp. 172–173.

prominence to the moral aspect embodied in the Islamic message and its bearer, Muḥammad (peace be upon him). He refutes what the unbelievers alleged about him. He reassures the persecuted believers that He is on their side, so they do not have to think about their enemies, powerful and wealthy as they may seem.

We find in this *sūrah* many examples of how God comforts and reassures the Prophet: "*Nūn. By the pen, by all they write, you are not, by your Lord's grace, a madman. And indeed you shall have a never-ending reward. Most certainly, yours is a sublime character.*" (Verses 1–4) He also says of the believers: "*For the God-fearing there shall be gardens of bliss with their Lord. Should We treat those who submit themselves to Us as We treat the guilty? What is the matter with you? On what basis do you judge?*" (Verses 34–36) Of one of the Prophet's more prominent enemies, God says: "*Pay no heed to any contemptible swearer, slanderer, going about with defaming tales, hinderer of good, aggressor, sinful, cruel and, on top of all that, given to evil. Just because he has wealth and children, when Our revelations are recited to him, he says, 'Fables of the ancients!' We shall brand him on the snout.*" (Verses 10–16) The Almighty then speaks about the war against those who deny the truth generally: "*Therefore, leave to Me those who deny this revelation. We shall bring them low, step by step, in ways beyond their knowledge. I will allow them more time: My scheme is truly firm.*" (Verses 44–45) This is different from the punishment of the hereafter when the arrogant will be humiliated: "*On the day when matters become so dire, they will be asked to prostrate themselves, but they will not be able to do so. Their eyes will be downcast, with ignominy overwhelming them. They were invited to prostrate themselves when they were safe.*" (Verses 42–43)

The *sūrah* cites the example of those people who had a garden, but were too greedy. This serves as a warning directed against the elders of the Quraysh who, feeling powerful on account of their wealth and families, schemed against the new message, trying to bring it down. At the end, the *sūrah* enjoins the Prophet to remain steadfast in adversity: "*So, await in patience your Lord's judgement; and do not be like the man in the whale...*" (Verse 48)

Through such comforting, praise and reassurance, coupled with fearsome warnings and an uncompromising attack on the unbelievers,

God Himself takes up the fight. We can discern the features of that period when the believers were few, weak, suffering persecution and hardship and facing a determined effort to uproot the tree of their new faith. In the *sūrah*'s style, the words it uses and in its themes we identify certain features of the environment in which the new message functioned. Essentially, it was characterized by naïve concepts, petty concerns, and the lack of any profound thinking.

Such naïvety is seen in the unbelievers' crude methods to counter the Prophet's message. They describe him as a madman, but this is an allegation that lacks even elementary tact. It is crude abuse levelled by uncouth, unrefined and ill-mannered people.

Their naïvety is brought into focus by the way God refutes their false allegations. First of all, the line it takes is the most suited to their own conditions: "*You are not, by your Lord's grace, a madman. And indeed you shall have a never-ending reward. Most certainly, yours is a sublime character. You shall before long see, as they will see, which of you is the one afflicted.*" (Verses 2–6) Secondly, the *sūrah* adds a clear warning: "*So pay no heed to those who deny the truth. They would love that you compromise with them, so that they will also compromise.*" (Verses 8–9) Thirdly, the refutation turns their abusive words against one of their own number: "*Furthermore, pay no heed to any contemptible swearer, slanderer, going about with defaming tales, hinderer of good, aggressor, sinful, cruel and, on top of all that, given to evil.*" (Verses 10–13) Fourthly, the focus increases as the *sūrah* tells the story of those owners of a garden who lacked all refinement despite their wealth. In their arrogance, they whisper to each other that they will make sure that no poor people will be allowed into their garden to disrupt their harvest.

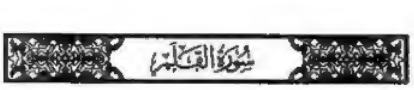
Furthermore, the unbelievers' naïvety is clearly shown in the argument put to them: "*Or have you a divine book which you study, and in which you find that you shall have all that you choose? Or have you received solemn oaths, binding on Us till the Day of Resurrection, that you will get whatever you yourselves decide? Ask them which of them will vouch for this.*" (Verses 37–40)

We see all these features through the expressions used in the *sūrah*. They are of benefit in our study of the events that took place during the Prophet's lifetime and as we follow the progress of the Islamic message.

They explain how the Qur'ān elevated that social environment and the Muslim community towards the end of the Prophet's mission, and how far removed from such crudeness and naïvety the Muslim community became. To appreciate the wide gulf between the two situations we only need to study the mode of address the Qur'ān adopts in speaking to the Muslim community at the time. We need also to look at the changes in the situation of that Muslim community, its concerns, feelings and attitudes brought about within no more than 20 years, a period that is no more than a glance in the life of nations. Such a change in the social fabric of the community was both profound and firmly established, yet accomplished in such a short time. It enabled that community to assume mankind's leadership, attaining at the same time a sublime standard of morality that no other human leadership has ever attained. It was a unique standard in the very nature of the faith it preached, its practical effects on human life, its broad outlook that views all mankind with love and compassion, and its meeting all the community's needs: emotional, intellectual and social.

All in all, the progress so achieved was miraculous, elevating the community from such naïvety to a high standard of refinement and broadness of vision. It was such an enormous transformation that entailed much more than a minority becoming the majority, or the weak becoming strong. Building character and imparting depth to a people's way of thinking are far more difficult than just increasing numbers and marshalling armies.

Al-Qalam (The Pen)



In the Name of God, the Lord of Grace, the Ever Merciful

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَٰنِ الرَّحِيمِ

Nūn. By the pen, by all they write, (1)

نٓ ۚ وَالْقَلَمِ وَمَا يَسْطُرُونَ ﴿١﴾

you are not, by your Lord's grace, a madman. (2)

مَا أَنتَ بِنِعْمَةِ رَبِّكَ بِمَجْنُونٍ ﴿٢﴾

And indeed you shall have a never-ending reward. (3)

وَإِنَّ لَكَ لَأَجْرًا غَيْرَ مَمْنُونٍ ﴿٣﴾

Most certainly, yours is a sublime character. (4)

وَإِنَّكَ لَعَلَىٰ خُلُقٍ عَظِيمٍ ﴿٤﴾

You shall before long see, as they will see, (5)

فَسَتُبْصِرُ وَيُبْصِرُونَ ﴿٥﴾

which of you is the one afflicted. (6)

بِأَيِّيكُمُ الْمَفْتُونُ ﴿٦﴾

Your Lord knows best who has strayed from His path, as He knows the ones who are rightly guided. (7)

إِنَّ رَبَّكَ هُوَ أَعْلَمُ بِمَن ضَلَّ عَن سَبِيلِهِ ۖ وَهُوَ أَعْلَمُ بِالْمُهْتَدِينَ ﴿٧﴾

So pay no heed to those who deny the truth. (8)

فَلَا تُطِعِ الْمُكَذِّبِينَ ﴿٨﴾

وَدُّوا لَوْ تُدْهِنُ فَيُدْهِنُونَ ﴿٩﴾

They would love that you compromise with them, so that they will also compromise. (9)

وَلَا تُطِعْ كُلَّ حَلَّافٍ مَّهِينٍ ﴿١٠﴾

Furthermore, pay no heed to any contemptible swearer, (10)

هَمَّازٍ مَّشَّاءٍ بِنَمِيمٍ ﴿١١﴾

slanderer, going about with defaming tales, (11)

مَّنَّاعٍ لِّلْخَيْرِ مُعْتَدٍ أَثِيمٍ ﴿١٢﴾

hinderer of good, aggressor, sinful, (12)

عُتُلٍّ بَعْدَ ذَٰلِكَ زَنِيمٍ ﴿١٣﴾

cruel and, on top of all that, given to evil. (13)

أَن كَانَ ذَا مَالٍ وَبَنِينَ ﴿١٤﴾

Just because he has wealth and children, (14)

إِذَا تُتْلَىٰ عَلَيْهِ آيَاتُنَا قَالَ أَسَاطِيرُ الْأَوَّلِينَ ﴿١٥﴾

when Our revelations are recited to him, he says, 'Fables of the ancients!' (15)

سَنَسِمُهُ عَلَى الْخُرْطُومِ ﴿١٦﴾

We shall brand him on the snout. (16)

إِنَّا بَلَوْنَاهُمْ كَمَا بَلَوْنَا أَصْحَابَ الْجَنَّةِ إِذْ أَقْسَمُوا لَيَصْرِمُنَّهَا مُصْبِحِينَ ﴿١٧﴾

We try them as We tried the owners of a certain garden, who vowed that they would harvest its fruits on the morrow, (17)

وَلَا يَسْتَثْنُونَ ﴿١٨﴾

and made no allowance. (18)

A visitation from your Lord came upon that garden while they were asleep, (19)

فَطَافَ عَلَيْهَا طَآئِفٌ مِّن رَّبِّكَ وَهُمْ نَآئِمُونَ ﴿١٩﴾

so that by morning it was stripped bare and looked desolate. (20)

فَأَصْبَحَتْ كَٱلصَّرِيمِ ﴿٢٠﴾

At daybreak they called out to one another: (21)

فَتَنَادَوْا۟ مُصْبِحِينَ ﴿٢١﴾

'Go early to your tilth if you wish to gather all its fruits.' (22)

أَنِ ٱغْدُوا۟ عَلَىٰ حَرْثِكُمْ إِن كُنتُمْ صَٰرِمِينَ ﴿٢٢﴾

So they went off, whispering to one another, (23)

فَٱنطَلَقُوا۟ وَهُمْ يَتَخَٰفَتُونَ ﴿٢٣﴾

'Make sure that no needy person enters the garden today.' (24)

أَن لَّا يَدْخُلَنَّهَا ٱلْيَوْمَ عَلَيْكُم مِّسْكِينٌ ﴿٢٤﴾

Early they went, strongly bent on their purpose. (25)

وَغَدَوْا۟ عَلَىٰ حَرْدٍ قَٰدِرِينَ ﴿٢٥﴾

When they saw it, they exclaimed: 'Surely we have lost our way! (26)

فَلَمَّا رَأَوْهَا قَالُوٓا۟ إِنَّا لَضَآلُّونَ ﴿٢٦﴾

No! We are utterly ruined.' (27)

بَلْ نَحْنُ مَحْرُومُونَ ﴿٢٧﴾

The wisest among them said, 'Did I not tell you, "Will you not extol God's limitless glory?"' (28)

قَالَ أَوْسَطُهُمْ أَلَمْ أَقُل لَّكُمْ لَوْلَا تُسَبِّحُونَ ﴿٢٨﴾

They said, 'Limitless in His glory is our Lord! Truly, we were doing wrong.' (29)

قَالُوا۟ سُبْحَٰنَ رَبِّنَآ إِنَّا كُنَّا ظَٰلِمِينَ ﴿٢٩﴾

فَأَقْبَلَ بَعْضُهُمْ عَلَىٰ بَعْضٍ يَتَلَاوَمُونَ ﴿٣٠﴾

Then they turned upon each other with mutual reproach. (30)

قَالُوا يَا وَيْلَنَا إِنَّا كُنَّا طَاغِينَ ﴿٣١﴾

They said: 'Woe betide us! We have done great wrong. (31)

عَسَىٰ رَبُّنَا أَن يُبْدِلَنَا خَيْرًا مِّنْهَا إِنَّا إِلَىٰ رَبِّنَا رَاغِبُونَ ﴿٣٢﴾

It may be that our Lord will grant us something better instead. To our Lord we truly turn in hope.' (32)

كَذَٰلِكَ الْعَذَابُ ۖ وَلَعَذَابُ الْآخِرَةِ أَكْبَرُ ۚ لَوْ كَانُوا يَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٣٣﴾

Such is the suffering [in this life], but greater indeed is the suffering in the life to come, if they but knew it. (33)

إِنَّ لِلْمُتَّقِينَ عِندَ رَبِّهِمْ جَنَّاتِ النَّعِيمِ ﴿٣٤﴾

For the God-fearing there shall be gardens of bliss with their Lord. (34)

أَفَنَجْعَلُ الْمُسْلِمِينَ كَالْمُجْرِمِينَ ﴿٣٥﴾

Should We treat those who submit themselves to Us as We treat the guilty? (35)

مَا لَكُمْ كَيْفَ تَحْكُمُونَ ﴿٣٦﴾

What is the matter with you? On what basis do you judge? (36)

أَمْ لَكُمْ كِتَابٌ فِيهِ تَدْرُسُونَ ﴿٣٧﴾

Or have you a divine book which you study, (37)

إِنَّ لَكُمْ فِيهِ لَمَا تَخَيَّرُونَ ﴿٣٨﴾

and in which you find that you shall have all that you choose? (38)

أَمْ لَكُمْ أَيْمَٰنٌ عَلَيْنَا بَٰلِغَةٌ إِلَىٰ يَوْمِ ٱلْقِيَٰمَةِ
إِنَّ لَكُمْ لَمَا تَحْكُمُونَ ﴿٣٩﴾

Or have you received solemn oaths, binding on Us till the Day of Resurrection, that you will get whatever you yourselves decide? (39)

سَلْهُمْ أَيُّهُم بِذَٰلِكَ زَعِيمٌ ﴿٤٠﴾

Ask them which of them will vouch for this. (40)

أَمْ لَهُمْ شُرَكَآءُ فَلْيَأْتُوا۟ بِشُرَكَآئِهِمْ إِن
كَانُوا۟ صَٰدِقِينَ ﴿٤١﴾

Or have they partners? Let them produce their partners, if what they say is true. (41)

يَوْمَ يُكْشَفُ عَن سَاقٍ وَيُدْعَوْنَ إِلَى
ٱلسُّجُودِ فَلَا يَسْتَطِيعُونَ ﴿٤٢﴾

On the day when matters become so dire, they will be asked to prostrate themselves, but they will not be able to do so. (42)

خَٰشِعَةً أَبْصَٰرُهُمْ تَرْهَقُهُمْ ذِلَّةٌ ۖ وَقَدْ كَانُوا۟
يُدْعَوْنَ إِلَى ٱلسُّجُودِ وَهُمْ سَٰلِمُونَ ﴿٤٣﴾

Their eyes will be downcast, with ignominy overwhelming them. They were invited to prostrate themselves when they were safe. (43)

فَذَرْنِى وَمَن يُكَذِّبُ بِهَٰذَا ٱلْحَدِيثِ ۖ
سَنَسْتَدْرِجُهُم مِّنْ حَيْثُ
لَا يَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٤٤﴾

Therefore, leave to Me those who deny this revelation. We shall bring them low, step by step, in ways beyond their knowledge. (44)

وَأُمْلِى لَهُمْ ۚ إِنَّ كَيْدِى مَتِينٌ ﴿٤٥﴾

I will allow them more time: My scheme is truly firm. (45)

أَمْ تَسْـَٔلُهُمْ أَجْرًا فَهُم مِّن مَّغْرَمٍ
مُّثْقَلُونَ ﴿٤٦﴾

Do you [Prophet] demand a payment from them [and so they fear] that they would be burdened with debt? (46)

أَمْ عِندَهُمُ ٱلْغَيْبُ فَهُمْ يَكْتُبُونَ ﴿٤٧﴾

Do they have knowledge of the hidden reality so that they can write it down? (47)

فَٱصْبِرْ لِحُكْمِ رَبِّكَ وَلَا تَكُن كَصَاحِبِ
ٱلْحُوتِ إِذْ نَادَىٰ وَهُوَ مَكْظُومٌ ﴿٤٨﴾

So, await in patience your Lord's judgement; and do not be like the man in the whale who called out in distress. (48)

لَّوْلَآ أَن تَدَارَكَهُۥ نِعْمَةٌ مِّن رَّبِّهِۦ لَنُبِذَ
بِٱلْعَرَآءِ وَهُوَ مَذْمُومٌ ﴿٤٩﴾

Had not grace from his Lord reached him, he would have been left upon that barren shore in a state of disgrace. (49)

فَٱجْتَبَىٰهُ رَبُّهُۥ فَجَعَلَهُۥ مِنَ ٱلصَّٰلِحِينَ ﴿٥٠﴾

His Lord, however, chose him and made him one of the righteous. (50)

وَإِن يَكَادُ ٱلَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا۟ لَيُزْلِقُونَكَ بِأَبْصَٰرِهِمْ لَمَّا
سَمِعُوا۟ ٱلذِّكْرَ وَيَقُولُونَ إِنَّهُۥ لَمَجْنُونٌ ﴿٥١﴾

The unbelievers well-nigh trip you up with their eyes when they hear this reminder. They say, 'He is surely mad.' (51)

وَمَا هُوَ إِلَّا ذِكْرٌ لِّلْعَٰلَمِينَ ﴿٥٢﴾

Yet it is but a reminder to all mankind. (52)

Issues Spelled Out

"*Nūn. By the pen, by all they write.*" (Verse 1) The *sūrah* begins with an oath by God Almighty. The oath is by the letter *nūn*, the pen and writing. The relationship between this letter of the alphabet and the other two, i.e. the pen and writing, is clear. As God swears by these He gives them due importance, highlighting this and presenting it to a community where learning through this approach was not valued. In fact, writing was very rare and primitive in that community while the role it was destined to play required that such ability develop and become widespread. This was the only way through which it could advocate its faith and the systems it laid down for human life. It would then be required to provide wise leadership for humanity. Writing is no doubt a basic element in fulfilling such tasks.

This point is endorsed by the fact that Islamic revelations started with the order to read: "*Read in the name of your Lord who has created – created man out of a germ-cell. Read – for your Lord is the most Bountiful One, Who has taught the use of the pen, taught man what he did not know.*" (96: 1–5) This instruction was given to the unlettered Prophet, whom God in His infinite wisdom willed to be unable to read and write. Yet the revelations vouchsafed to him began with such emphasis on learning through reading and writing with the pen. This importance is reiterated here by the oath using the letter *nūn*, the pen and the writing. All this should be seen as part of the divine system of cultivating the Muslim community and preparing it for the universal role God assigned to it.

God Almighty states this oath by *nūn*, the pen and writing to refute the unbelievers' false allegation. He shows how improbable it is, since it is He who bestowed His grace on His Messenger: "*You are not, by your Lord's grace, a madman.*" (Verse 2) This short verse also identifies God's grace bestowed on the Prophet in an expression that confirms his closeness to Him. At the same time, the verse refutes the alleged condition, one that cannot combine with God's grace bestowed on His chosen servant.

Anyone who studies the Prophet's relations with his people will be utterly astonished that any should level such a description at him. They

knew him to be very wise. Several years before his prophethood, they accepted his arbitration in a dispute over which of their clans should be honoured with placing the Black Stone in its position in the Ka'bah. It was they who nicknamed him *al-Amīn*, meaning the trustworthy. They also continued to deposit their valuables with him for safekeeping, and this despite their fierce enmity towards him and his message, throughout his time in Makkah. Indeed, so trustworthy was the Prophet that he entrusted his cousin, 'Alī, with the task of returning such deposits to them when he migrated to Madīnah. The unbelievers also confirmed that he never told a lie even before the start of his prophethood. Heracules, the Byzantine Emperor, asked Abū Sufyān, the Quraysh leader, whether they ever accused Muḥammad of lying before he became a prophet. Abū Sufyān, who was his sworn enemy at the time, said that they did not. Heracules then said: "He would not refrain from lying to people and then start lying to God."

It is absolutely astounding that the hatred felt by the Quraysh unbelievers was of such a magnitude that they should make allegations of this sort against a noble man distinguished among them by his wisdom and high standards of morality. Yet grudges can blind people to the truth. The perpetrator of such falsehood is the first to know that he is a wicked liar.

This spiteful lie by the unbelievers is countered with a gesture of compassionate honour: "*You are not, by your Lord's grace, a madman.*" (Verse 2) Moreover, "*And indeed you shall have a never-ending reward.*" (Verse 3) This never-ending reward is granted by your Lord who has bestowed on you the honour of prophethood. This gives solace and abundant compensation for any type of isolation or allegation the unbelievers may hurl at him. What loss could be incurred by the one whose Lord kindly and benevolently assures him of a continuing reward, one that never ends?

A Testimony by God

This is followed by a great testimony and abundant honour: "*Most certainly, yours is a sublime character.*" (Verse 4) The whole universe echoes this unique praise of the Prophet. No writer can describe the value of this

great testimony by the Creator of the universe; no imagination can give it its worth. It is a testimony by God, according to His own measure, given to His servant, in His own words: "*Most certainly, yours is a sublime character.*" A sublime character has, according to God's measure, its own unique value which no other creature can imagine.

This testimony confirms Muḥammad's greatness in several ways. First of all, by the fact that it is God's own testimony, given in His majesty, and appreciated by the whole universe and echoed by everyone on high. Secondly, his greatness is seen by virtue of the fact that Muḥammad (peace be upon him) was able to receive God's testimony, live with it and know who was saying it. It was God Almighty, in His absolute power and knowledge, that stated it. The Prophet knew his own position in relation to such absolutely great power. He could appreciate this position as no one else could. The fact that Muḥammad (peace be upon him) held his position firmly as he received this word, from its sublime source, without being crushed by the pressure it brought on him, and that he remained calm and stable is the best evidence of his own greatness.

There are many reports about the Prophet's greatness given by his Companions. Indeed, his practical conduct is better evidence than anything reported about him. However, this testimony, given by God Almighty, is greater still than any reported evidence. God knows best whom to entrust with His final message. Muḥammad, (peace be upon him), in his sublime character, was indeed the one to deliver this message, which is the noblest in history. He was a match for it, and a living example of its greatness. The message of Islam is so perfect, beautiful, comprehensive and truthful that it could only be delivered by a man who deserved such testimony from God, and by one who would receive such divine testimony with confidence. At the same time, however, God remonstrated with the Prophet for some of his actions but all the while imbibing the same confidence and reassurance. He declared both aspects to all people, hiding nothing. In both situations, he was a noble Prophet, an obedient servant and a trusted deliverer of the divine message.

The greatness of Muḥammad (peace be upon him) mirrors the greatness of the Islamic message: both go further in scope than the most powerful telescope can reach. The most that anyone who wants to monitor this dual greatness can do is to look at it without assigning

limits to it, and point to its field in the universe, without setting parameters on it.

Once more I feel the need to stress the broad significance of the fact that the Prophet received this testimony from his Lord and that he remained firm, confident and reassured. He himself, a human being, would praise one of his Companions and that person, as well as those close to him, would feel so excited and overwhelmed with joy. Yet all involved, the one making the statement of praise, the praised person and the ones who heard of it knew that the Prophet was human. It is true that he was a Prophet, yet he remained within the human circle, with its well-known limitations. In his case, the praise came from God Almighty, and he knew of God what no one else could know. Yet he remained firm and continued his mission. How this must have felt is beyond imagination.

It was Muḥammad alone who could attain such a sublime level of greatness and human perfection that matched the spirit God breathed into man. Muḥammad alone matched this ultimate divine message to mankind so that it is reflected in him alive, taking the form of a man. Muḥammad alone was the one God knew to be worthy of this position and further knew that his character was sublime. It was God who declared here His testimony that he had a sublime character, as also declared elsewhere in the Qur'ān that He, the Lord of all the worlds, showered His blessings on him: "*God and His angels bless the Prophet. Believers! Bless him and give him greetings of peace.*" (33: 56) Only God can grant one of His own servants such a great and unique favour.

Emphasis on Morality

We also note here that the moral element is given considerable weight in God's measure. It is a fundamental element in the Islamic message, just as it is fundamental in the Prophet's own character. Indeed, we note its prominence in both. In fact, both legislative and educational aspects of the Islamic message rely on moral values. The strongest emphasis in what it advocates is laid on purity, cleanliness, honesty, truth, justice, mercy, compassion, kindness, fulfilment of promises and commitments, actions matching words and both consistent with

intentions and thoughts. It forbids injustice, dishonesty, cheating, taking other people's property unlawfully, violating other people's rights and honour and spreading immorality in any way or form. Its laws are geared to protecting these principles and safeguarding the moral element in people's consciences and behaviour, as well as in personal, social and international dealings.

The Prophet says: "I have been given the message that perfects noble morality." He thus sums up the objective of his message. His teachings are highly consistent in emphasizing the importance of morality and good manners. His own behaviour provides a shining picture as well as a practical noble example that merits a record in God's eternal book: "*Most certainly, yours is a sublime character.*" (Verse 4) Thus God praises His Messenger as well as the morality aspect of His message. With such praise God sets out a strong bond pulling the earth towards heaven. He makes this aspect the one to which believers' hearts, those who look up to His reward, are strongly attached. He thus identifies for them which values He would like them to possess.

This is the unique aspect of Islamic morality. It does not stem from the local environment, or indeed from any earthly consideration. Nor does it draw on any tradition, interest or bond that was at play in that generation. Instead, it comes from heaven and relies on it. It responds to the call coming from heaven so that those on earth look up to a high horizon. It derives from God's own absolute attributes, which people are asked to emulate. This so that ordinary human beings can achieve their utmost level of humanity and be worthy of God's honour, bestowed on them as they are placed in charge of the earth. It is in this way only that they will merit a more sublime life, "*in a seat of truth, in the presence of an all-powerful Sovereign.*" (54: 55) This means that Islamic morality is not restricted by any earthly limitation. It rather aspires to the highest level that people can achieve.

Moreover, Islamic morality is not a set of individual values, such as truthfulness, honesty, justice, mercy, kindness, etc. Rather, it is a complete system in which personal education collaborates with the legal code; a system that deals with life as a whole and defines its direction. It ultimately seeks God's pleasure, and nothing else. This morality, in its perfection, beauty, balance, consistency, straightforwardness and unity

was reflected in the person of Muḥammad, (peace be upon him), as he deservedly earned the praise granted by none other than God Almighty: "*Most certainly, yours is a sublime character.*" (Verse 4)

Reassurance About the Future

God then reassures His Messenger about the immediate future and how things will develop with those unbelievers who hurled such lies at him. He warns them that their true situation will be publicized and their falsehood be made public:

> *You shall before long see, as they will see, which of you is the one afflicted. Your Lord knows best who has strayed from His path, as He knows the ones who are rightly guided.* (Verses 5–7)

The afflicted person whom God assures the Prophet will be identified to all is the one that has gone astray, or the one subjected to a test that reveals his true condition. The two meanings are not much apart. This promise reassures the Prophet and the believers in his message and at the same time it warns those who oppose and abuse him, regardless of whatever type of madness they attribute to him. Most probably they did not mean that he was insane, because they realized that this could not be the case. They probably meant that he had associates from among the *jinn*, who perhaps inspired him with the fine words he recited. They used to say that every poet had someone from the *jinn* assisting their efforts. This was, however, far from the case with the Prophet. Nor does it fit with the nature of his revelations that are both consistent and truthful.

This promise by God confirms that the future will make clear the true nature of the Prophet and those who denied his message. The future will prove which party was afflicted or had gone astray. God reassured him that his Lord "*knows best who has strayed from His path, as He knows the ones who are rightly guided.*" (Verse 7) It is his Lord who gave him his revelations. He indeed knows that he and his followers are rightly guided. This is enough to reassure the Prophet and set his enemies worrying about what the future will bring.

God then tells the Prophet of their true feelings as they continued to argue with him about the truth he preached and the abuse they levelled at him. They may appear determined to uphold their ignorant beliefs, but the truth is that they are fundamentally uncertain about them. They are ready to shed most of these if only the Prophet would abandon some of what he called on them to accept. They are prepared to compromise everything, retaining only some appearances in return for a gesture of compromise from him. They do not have a faith that they consider to embody the truth; they are only keen to retain some appearances:

> *So pay no heed to those who deny the truth. They would love that you compromise with them, so that they will also compromise.* (Verses 8–9)

It is all subject to negotiation, then, with the aim of agreeing a meeting point somewhere in the middle, just like commercial transactions. Yet the difference between beliefs and commercial activities is vast. A person with faith will not abandon any of its beliefs or values, because its minor points are the same as its major ones. Indeed, in faith there is nothing minor and nothing major: both are the same. A faith is a single unity with parts complementing each other. Its advocate will never discard any part of it in order to please someone else.

Islam and *jāhiliyyah* can never meet halfway, or indeed in any way. This is true of Islam everywhere and across all generations. All states of ignorance, or *jāhiliyyah*, are the same: past, present or future. The gulf that separates the two states is unbridgeable and admits no compromise. The two are diametrically opposed.

Several reports speak of what the unbelievers in Makkah tried to achieve by way of compromise with the Prophet so that he would stop criticizing their worship methods. They hoped that he would give them something that would save their faces if they were to follow him. In this, they were no different from any negotiator seeking a compromise. The Prophet, however, maintained a decisive firmness, refusing to give up even a small part of his faith. Additionally, he was extremely well mannered, kind and benevolent towards his tribesmen, eager to make things easy for them. With regard to faith, he was committed,

obedient of God's instructions: "*So pay no heed to those who deny the truth.*" (Verse 8)

The Prophet did not compromise an iota of his faith even during the direst period of his life in Makkah, where he and his few followers were under siege, suffering immense persecution. He never withheld a word that needed to be uttered in the face of such tyrants. He never sought to soften their stance or to avoid their persecution by such compromise. Nor did he ever hesitate to clarify any point that was closely or remotely relevant to his faith.

Ibn Hishām reports in his biography of the Prophet:

> It should be said in fairness that the chiefs of Makkah did not take any action worth noting against the Prophet in the early stages. When he started to criticize their pagan faith and ridicule their idols, however, they began to think that the matter was much too serious to ignore. Yet, they could not do much about it because Abū Ṭālib protected his nephew against all threats. To ignore such protection by the Makkan chiefs would contravene one of the basic conventions of their social set-up. Therefore, a small delegation, composed of a number of the most influential people in Makkah, went to Abū Ṭālib complaining about his nephew's behaviour. The delegation included the two brothers 'Utbah and Shaybah, sons of Rabī'ah from the clan of 'Abd Shams; Abū Sufyān Sakhr ibn Ḥarb from Ummayah; Abū al-Bakhtarī al-'Āṣ ibn Hishām and al-Aswad ibn al-Muṭṭalib from Asad, Abū Jahl 'Amr ibn Hishām and al-Walīd ibn al-Mughīrah from Makhzūm; the two brothers Nabīh and Munnabih sons of al-Hajjāj from Sahm and Al-'Āṣ ibn Wā'il, also from Sahm. They made their complaint clear to Abū Ṭālib and they offered him the choice of either telling Muḥammad not to criticize their ways and ridicule their idols or allowing them to take such effective measures as they might deem necessary to end the trouble. Abū Ṭālib, who continued to follow the religion of his people, spoke to them gently and calmed them down. He did not promise them much.
>
> The Prophet continued to preach his message regardless. The crisis with his people increased in intensity. Feelings of hostility

spread. So the delegation went again to Abū Ṭālib and said to him: "Abū Ṭālib, you enjoy a position of honour and respect among us. We have requested you to stop your nephew, but you have not taken any action. We certainly cannot just sit and do nothing when he continues to speak ill of our forefathers and to ridicule us and our gods. You have to stop him or we will fight him and you over this question until one of the two parties is destroyed."

Abū Ṭālib was in a dilemma. He did not like to quarrel with his people, yet he could not bear to let his nephew down. So he called Muḥammad and explained to him what had taken place between him and his visitors. He then said to him: "You see the difficulty of my situation. Do not put my life and your life at risk, and do not burden me with what I cannot bear."

The Prophet felt that his uncle might be contemplating withdrawing his protection so he stated his own position with the greatest emphasis he could muster: "Uncle, should they give me the sun in my right hand and the moon in my left hand in return for abandoning my call, I would not do anything of the sort until God has brought this message to triumph or until I have perished." The Prophet was under the pressure of such strong emotions that tears sprang to his eyes. He started to walk away, but his uncle called him back, saying reassuringly: "My nephew, you may go and say whatever you like. I will never withdraw my protection from you, and never will I let you down."[2]

This is an image of the Prophet's commitment to his message at the precise moment when his uncle and protector, who was his last resort on earth, seemed on the verge of letting him down. It is a powerful image in its very nature, connotations and implications, as well as in its words and expressions. It is as new and powerful as this faith is. It is a reflection of the truth of God's description of the Prophet: "*Most certainly, yours is a sublime character.*" (Verse 4)

Another image also reported by Ibn Hishām, through Ibn Isḥāq relates a direct attempt at compromise offered by the unbelievers. This

2. Ibn Hishām, ibid., pp. 282–285. Also, Adil Salahi, ibid., pp. 95–96.

they did when they realized that the Prophet continued to be as firm as ever, despite their persecution of his Companions and their attempts to force them to renounce Islam.

'Utbah ibn Rabī'ah, one of the leading figures in Makkah, was one day sitting with a group of the Quraysh notables when he noticed the Prophet sitting alone close to the Ka'bah. 'Utbah suggested to his friends: "Shall we go to Muḥammad and make him some offers? He may accept one or the other. If he does we will give him that and put an end to our problem with him."

This idea was greeted with unanimous approval. As 'Utbah sat with the Prophet he addressed him: "My nephew, you know you command a position of high esteem and noble birth among us. You have brought into the life of your community something very serious indeed. You have thus caused disunity to creep into their ranks; you have belittled their ideals, ridiculed their gods and their religion and spoken ill of their forefathers. Now listen to me. I am making you some offers which I would like you to consider. You may, perhaps, find some of them acceptable."

The Prophet asked him to make his proposals, and listened attentively. 'Utbah said: "My nephew, if you have started this affair hoping to make money out of it, we are all willing to give you some of our own wealth so that you would be the richest among us. If it is honour and position you want, we will make you our master and seek your advice in all matters. If it is a throne you are after, we will make you our king. If, on the other hand, you are possessed and are unable to resist what overwhelms you, we will spare no expense in seeking a medical cure for you."

When 'Utbah stopped, the Prophet asked him whether he had finished. As 'Utbah affirmed that he had, the Prophet asked him to listen to what he had to say. The Prophet then recited the first 38 verses of *Sūrah* 41 of the Qur'ān. 'Utbah listened attentively. When the Prophet finished his recitation, he prostrated himself in humble devotion to God, before saying to 'Utbah: "You have heard what I have to say and you can make up your own mind."

> 'Utbah left quietly and went to his people, who realized as they saw him approaching that a change had come over him. They looked up at him curiously, listening to his words: "I have heard something the like of which I have never heard in my life. It is neither poetry nor sorcery. Take up the suggestion I am making to you, and lay the blame for the outcome at my door. Leave this man alone. What I have heard from him will certainly bring about great events. Should the rest of the Arabs kill him, you would have been spared the trouble. If he wins, whatever glory he achieves will be yours." They retorted: "He has certainly bewitched you." He said: "I have stated my opinion, and you can do as you wish."[3]

A different report suggests that when 'Utbah listened to the Prophet's recitation, he stopped him when the Prophet read the verse saying: "*If they turn away, say: 'I warn you of a thunderbolt like the thunderbolt that struck the 'Ād and Thamūd.*'" (41: 13) He was terrified and put his hand on the Prophet's mouth, and said to him: "I appeal to you, Muḥammad, by God and our kinship not to do that." He feared that the warning may come true. He then left him and went to his people suggesting that they leave Muḥammad alone.

Be that as it may, this was another way of trying to achieve compromise. Yet it also portrays an image of the Prophet's sublime character. We see him listening to 'Utbah's hollow offers, without stopping him, even though whatever 'Utbah had to offer did not deserve a moment's thought from Muḥammad (peace be upon him), considering his own vision of the universe and its values, and his understanding of the truth and what life on earth is worth. Yet his manners would not allow him to interrupt his interlocutor or to display any sign of annoyance with his worthless offers. Instead, he listened to him with full attention until he had finished. Then he asked him whether he had finished what he had to say. His attitude throughout was that of one who is certain of the truth, reassured and at the same time very polite.

A third form of the Quraysh's attempts to reach a compromise is seen in the following report by Ibn Isḥāq:

3. Ibn Hishām, ibid., pp. 313–314, Also, Adil Salahi, ibid., pp. 113–114.

> One day as the Prophet was doing the *ṭawāf* at the Ka'bah, he was stopped by a group of the Quraysh elders including al-Aswad ibn al-Muṭṭalib, al-Walīd ibn al-Mughīrah, Umayyah ibn Khalaf and al-'Āṣ ibn Wā'il. They said to him: 'Muḥammad! Let us worship the God you worship, and you worship the deities we worship. Thus, we will be together at the same level. If your God is better than ours, we will have benefited by that, and if our deities are the better ones, you will have made the benefit.' He answered as God instructed him: "*Say: 'Unbelievers! I do not worship what you worship, nor do you worship what I worship. I shall never worship what you worship, nor will you ever worship what I worship. You have your own religion and I have mine.'*"[4] (109: 1–6)

God thus put an end to this absurd offer, and the Prophet replied to them as God so instructed him.

What Sort of Nobility

The importance of the moral element is again stressed when the Prophet is ordered not to obey one particular unbeliever. We have a full list of the terrible and shameful qualities of this person, who is then threatened with humiliation:

> *Furthermore, pay no heed to any contemptible swearer, slanderer, going about with defaming tales, hinderer of good, aggressor, sinful, cruel and, on top of all that, given to evil. Just because he has wealth and children, when Our revelations are recited to him, he says, 'Fables of the ancients!' We shall brand him on the snout.* (Verses 10–16)

It is said that this person was al-Walīd ibn al-Mughīrah, to whom the following passage in *Sūrah* 74 also refers: "*Leave to me the one I created alone, to whom I have granted vast wealth, and sons by his side, making life smooth and easy for him; yet he greedily desires that I give him more. No! He has set himself stubbornly against Our revelations. I will constrain him*

4. Ibn Sayyid al-Nas (1996), *'Uyūn al-Athar*, Dar al-Turath, Madīnah, p. 197.

to endure a painful uphill climb! He thought and he schemed. Damn him, how he schemed! Again, damn him, how he schemed! He looked around, then he frowned and glared, then he turned his back and gloried in his arrogance, and said, 'This is just sorcery handed down from olden times! This is nothing but the word of a mere mortal!' I will cast him into the scorching fire." (74: 11–26) There are many reports that speak of al-Walīd's repeated scheming against the Prophet and his opposition to the message of Islam, trying to turn people away from it. It is also reported that the verses in the present *sūrah* refer to al-Akhnas ibn Sharīq, another of the Prophet's determined opponents. The present denunciation of the man, whether he was al-Walīd or al-Akhnas, and the stern warnings given in the other *sūrah*, suffice as evidence of this person's wicked role in the fight against the Prophet and the Islamic message. They also indicate his evil intentions and that he was devoid of all goodness.

The Qur'ān lists here nine of his bad characteristics. He is a 'swearer', which suggests that he always does so. Only a liar swears much because he feels that people do not believe him. Therefore, he resorts to swearing to persuade people to accept what he says. Moreover, he is 'contemptible', someone who does not even respect himself. Nor do people trust his word. This is proven by the fact that he feels the need to swear all the time to overcome people's mistrust. Despite the fact that he has wealth, sons and position, he remains contemptible. It is often the case that a tyrant remains contemptible even though he holds power and authority. Likewise, dignity is a personal trait which remains distinctive of its possessor even though he has nothing of the material luxuries of this world.

He is a 'slanderer' who disrespects people and tries to insult them by word and gesture, in their presence or absence. This is a characteristic that Islam brands as most hateful because it is contrary to gallantry, self-respect and propriety of conduct towards others in so far as respecting their dignity, regardless of their social position. The Qur'ān denounces this characteristic in several places: "*Woe to every taunting, slandering backbiter.*" (104: 1) "*Believers! No men shall deride other men: it may well be that those [whom they deride] are better than themselves. And no women [shall deride other] women: it may well be that those [whom they deride] are better than themselves. And neither shall you defame yourselves,*

nor insult one another by [opprobrious] epithets." (49: 11) All the actions mentioned in this verse are types of slander.

Another characteristic of this person is that he 'goes about with defaming tales'. He goes around, telling people what will spoil their relations, create rancour in their hearts and destroy their ties. This is an evil and contemptible quality that no one who respects himself and wants to be respected will entertain. People realize that the one who tells tales about others is unworthy of respect. Even those who listen to him will not respect him, because they know he is evil.

The Prophet instructed his Companions not to tell him anything that would cause him to change his attitude towards any of them. He said: "Let no one tell me any negative thing about any of my Companions. I love to come out to you with no ill-feeling in my heart." [Related by Abū Dāwūd and al-Tirmidhī.] In an authentic *ḥadīth*, 'Abdullāh ibn Mas'ūd reports that "the Prophet passed by two graves. He said that the two buried in them are suffering punishment for no cardinal sin. One of them used not to cover himself when urinating, and the other used to go about with defaming tales." [Related by al-Bukhārī and Muslim.] Hudhayfah quotes the Prophet as saying: "No one who goes about with defaming tales will be admitted into heaven." [Related by Aḥmad, al-Bukhārī, Muslim and others.] Yazīd ibn al-Sakan reports that "the Prophet said to his Companions: 'Shall I tell you who are the best among you?' They said: 'Please do.' He said: 'They are the ones who, when seen, the name of God is glorified.' He then said: 'Shall I tell you who are the worst among you? They are the ones who go about with defaming tales, who spoil relations between friends and try to get innocent people defamed.'" [Related by Aḥmad.]

Islam naturally denounces this despicable and shameful characteristic in strong terms. It spoils people's hearts and destroys friendships. It degrades the one who does it before it spoils relations between others. It undermines the person's own character even before undermining society. It creates mistrust between people and often lands the innocent in trouble.

Moreover, this person is a 'hinderer of good', preventing it from reaching him and others. He used to prevent people from accepting the divine faith, even though it is the sum of all goodness. Furthermore,

whenever he noticed that any of his children or clansmen leaned towards the Prophet, he would say to them: 'If any of you were to follow Muḥammad's religion, I would never give him an iota.' Thus he tried his utmost to prevent them from accepting Islam. Hence, the Qur'ān records this as one of his characteristics.

He is also an 'aggressor', stepping over the limits of right and justice. His aggression is levelled against the Prophet and the Muslims on the one hand, and against his own family and clan on the other, given he prevented them from accepting Islam. Aggression is an evil quality which the Qur'ān and the Prophet denounce in clear terms. Islam forbids it in any form, even in one's approach to food and drink: "*Eat of the wholesome things which We have provided for you and do not transgress.*" (20: 81) Both justice and moderation are essential qualities of the Islamic code.

What is more is that he is 'sinful', committing all sorts of sins so as to earn this description, without specifying what it is he does. Thus, committing sin becomes his essential characteristic.

The next characteristic is stated in translation as 'cruel', but in the Arabic original this is *'utull*, which by its very sound connotes a host of features that no group of words can adequately describe. The one who is *'utull* is cruel, unfriendly, gluttonous, heavy handed, mean, given to treating others badly. Abū al-Dardā', a Companion of the Prophet, defined an *'utull* person as 'the one who is covetous, ill-mannered, gluttonous, greedy for money, tight-fisted.' The word *'utull* thus reveals a hateful character.

On top of all these evil qualities, this enemy of Islam is also described as 'given to evil'. The Arabic word used here is *zanīm*, which has more than one meaning. One of these denotes someone who is attached to a group of people, but he is of suspect descent. None of them knows his parentage. Another meaning denotes a person who lacks morality and who is known by his many evil deeds. This second meaning is perhaps more true of al-Walīd ibn al-Mughīrah, but the use of this word here makes him contemptible even though he was also proud and arrogant.

These personal qualities are followed with a denunciation of this person's attitude to divine revelations: "*Just because he has wealth and children, when Our revelations are recited to him, he says, 'Fables of the*

ancients!'" (Verses 14–15) How ungrateful! How can anyone enjoy God's favours of children and wealth and then deride His revelations, ridicule His Messenger and denounce His message? By itself, this is equal to all the evil qualities already mentioned.

Hence a warning is issued to him by the Almighty. The warning hits at the very position of pride on account of his wealth and children, in the same way as the earlier mention of his personal characteristics hit at his pride in his position among his people. He hears now a threat that will inevitably be fulfilled: "*We shall brand him on the snout.*" (Verse 16)

The Arabic word *khurṭūm*, translated here as snout, means, among other things, the nose of a wild pig. Perhaps this is the meaning intended here, denoting his nose. In Arabic, the nose connotes dignity. People refer to an honourable person as one of high nose, while a humiliated one is described as having his nose in the dust. Hence, the threat of branding him on his nose connotes double humiliation: being branded like slaves used to be, and his nose being referred to as a snout or pig's nose.

Undoubtedly, these verses fell like a fatal blow for al-Walīd. He belonged to a community which attached much importance to avoiding abuse by a poet, even though the abuse was no more than false allegations. How about such a truthful description by the Creator of the universe, in such an inimitable style, and in the Qur'ān which is echoed throughout the universe for the rest of time! It was a fatal blow that this enemy of Islam and its noble Prophet deserved.

The People of the Garden

A reminder of the outcome of the greed and denial of other people's rights then follows. This in a reference to a group of people who owned a garden. It seems that the story was well known to the Arabs addressed by the Qur'ān. The reminder makes it clear that what people have of wealth and children is only a means to test them, in the same way as the people of the garden were put to trial. The result of all such tests will inevitably be revealed:

We try them as We tried the owners of a certain garden, who vowed that they would harvest its fruits on the morrow, and made no allowance. A visitation from your Lord came upon that garden while they were asleep, so that by morning it was stripped bare and looked desolate. At daybreak they called out to one another: 'Go early to your tilth if you wish to gather all its fruits.' So they went off, whispering to one another, 'Make sure that no needy person enters the garden today.' Early they went, strongly bent on their purpose. When they saw it, they exclaimed: 'Surely we have lost our way! No! We are utterly ruined.' The wisest among them said, 'Did I not tell you, "Will you not extol God's limitless glory?"' They said, 'Limitless in His glory is our Lord! Truly, we were doing wrong.' Then they turned upon each other with mutual reproach. They said: 'Woe betide us! We have done great wrong. It may be that our Lord will grant us something better instead. To our Lord we truly turn in hope.' Such is the suffering [in this life], but greater indeed is the suffering in the life to come, if they but knew it. (Verses 17–33)

This story may well have been well known, but its narration in the Qur'ān reveals what lies behind its episodes of God's power, the tests He sets for some of His servants and their requital at the end. This is, then, what is new in its presentation in the Qur'ān. As it unfolds, we see a group of naïve people who appear to us in their thoughts and actions like simple rural people. Perhaps this type of person was closer to the addressees who were stubborn in their rejection of the faith, but who were not particularly sophisticated characters. Rather, they tended to be simple folk.

From an artistic point of view, the narrative represents one of the methods of story-telling in the Qur'ān. It includes an element of surprise that captures the listener's interest. It shows the ludicrous nature of human scheming as compared with God's planning. Moreover, the events are brought alive as if we see them unfolding.

We see the owners of a garden agreeing to a plan. According to reports, the previous owner of the garden was a good man who had allocated a portion of its harvest to the poor. His heirs, however, wanted to keep all its fruits and yield for themselves, depriving the poor of their customary share.

The story now unfolds: "*We try them as We tried the owners of a certain garden, who vowed that they would harvest its fruits on the morrow, and made no allowance.*" (Verses 17–18) They made up their minds to harvest its fruits very early in the morning, taking all for themselves and making no allowance for the poor. They swore to this and even went to bed with this evil intention. We leave them in their slumber to look at what takes place during the night when they are totally unaware. God certainly does not sleep. His scheme is different from theirs: "*A visitation from your Lord came upon that garden while they were asleep, so that by morning it was stripped bare and looked desolate.*" (Verses 19–20) We then leave the garden to look at the plotters and what they are now doing.

They wake up very early, calling each other to get ready: "*At daybreak they called out to one another: 'Go early to your tilth if you wish to gather all its fruits.'*" (Verses 21–22) Thus they remind and counsel one another. The *sūrah* carries its ridicule further, showing them on their way, speaking in whispers to ensure that no one learns of their plot to deprive the poor of their legitimate share: "*So they went off, whispering to one another, 'Make sure that no needy person enters the garden today.'*" (Verses 23–24) We, the reader and listener, know something unknown to the owners of the garden. We have seen the subtle hand making away with all its fruits, leaving it stripped bare. We, therefore, hold our breath to look at what these plotters do.

The *sūrah* adds more ridicule: "*Early they went, strongly bent on their purpose.*" (Verse 25) They certainly felt able to deprive others, or at least to deprive themselves. Now for the surprise: "*When they saw it, they exclaimed: 'Surely we have lost our way!'*" (Verse 26) This is certainly not our garden. We seem to have lost our way. However, they soon make sure: "*No! We are utterly ruined.*" (Verse 27) This is the truth of the matter.

Now that they are facing the results of their scheme that aimed to deprive the needy, the middle one among them, who was their best and wisest, reminds them of his earlier counsel. He apparently had a different point of view, but when he could not persuade them to accept it, he went along with them instead of holding on to the truth. Hence, he suffered the same fate as they. Hence, too, his reminder: "*The wisest among them said: 'Did I not tell you, "Will you not extol God's limitless*

glory?"" (Verse 28) Now, when it is too late, they listen to sound counsel: "*They said, 'Limitless in His glory is our Lord! Truly, we were doing wrong.*'" (Verse 29)

As happens in every situation when results turn bad, everyone tries to shift the blame away from himself: "*Then they turned upon each other with mutual reproach.*" (Verse 30) Then, they finally stop blaming each other and acknowledge their common fault, hoping that God will forgive them and replace their lost harvest: "*They said: 'Woe betide us! We have done great wrong. It may be that our Lord will grant us something better instead. To our Lord we truly turn in hope.*'" (Verses 31–32)

Before the curtains are drawn on the last scene we have the *sūrah*'s parting comment: "*Such is the suffering [in this life], but greater indeed is the suffering in the life to come, if they but knew it.*" (Verse 33) This, then, is a test of affluence. The people of Makkah should learn this lesson for they are being tested in the same way as the owners of the garden were tested. They should consider what their own test will bring in its wake. They should take heed and avoid what is certainly greater than any test and suffering endured in this present world: "*Greater indeed is the suffering in the life to come, if they but knew it.*"

The *sūrah* cites this well-known story, given it deals with their own environment. In this way it establishes a clear link between the application of God's law to communities of olden times and to the generation being addressed. It touches their hearts with what is close to their own lives. At the same time it tells the believers that the wealth they see the unbelievers enjoying is nothing but a test God sets for them. It has its own consequences. It is part of God's law that He tests people either with luxuries and comforts or with hardship. Those who behave with arrogance, deprive others of their share, and feel that what they are given is theirs by right may always face a result of the type suffered by those owners of the garden. Yet, "*greater indeed is the suffering in the life to come, if they but knew it.*" (Verse 33) Believers who watch God in all their actions enjoy a different outcome: "*For the God-fearing there shall be gardens of bliss with their Lord.*" (Verse 34) The contrast between the two ends echoes the contrast between their behaviour and reality. Two opposite lines of action lead to two contrasting ends.

Can They Be Equal?

At this point, the *sūrah* puts a simple, uncomplicated argument to them, challenging them, putting to them one question after another, on matters that can have only one answer. It warns them, showing them a fearsome scene of the life to come, and threatens them that, in this present life, they could face a war against God Almighty:

> *Should We treat those who submit themselves to Us as We treat the guilty? What is the matter with you? On what basis do you judge? Or have you a divine book which you study, and in which you find that you shall have all that you choose? Or have you received solemn oaths, binding on Us till the Day of Resurrection, that you will get whatever you yourselves decide? Ask them which of them will vouch for this. Or have they partners? Let them produce their partners, if what they say is true. On the day when matters become so dire, they will be asked to prostrate themselves, but they will not be able to do so. Their eyes will be downcast, with ignominy overwhelming them. They were invited to prostrate themselves when they were safe. Therefore, leave to Me those who deny this revelation. We shall bring them low, step by step, in ways beyond their knowledge. I will allow them more time: My scheme is truly firm. Do you [Prophet] demand a payment from them [and so they fear] that they would be burdened with debt? Do they have knowledge of the hidden reality so that they can write it down?* (Verses 35–47)

The warning against punishment in the life to come and a war in this present life is made within the argument and challenge this passage delineates. This has the effect of heightening the argument and increasing the pressure the challenge represents. The passage starts with a rhetorical question: "*Should We treat those who submit themselves to Us as We treat the guilty?*" (Verse 35) This question refers to the outcome of the two parties that has already been stated. This is a question that admits only one answer. No, it cannot be! Those who submit to God can never be treated on the same footing as those who are knowingly guilty. No logic and no standard of justice allows that the guilty and those who submit

to God should face the same result. Hence, the *sūrah* puts a second rhetorical question to them: "*What is the matter with you? On what basis do you judge?*" (Verse 36) How do you judge matters so as to make the two equal? This certainly cannot be.

The *sūrah* moves on to add an element of sarcasm: "*Or have you a divine book which you study, and in which you find that you shall have all that you choose?*" (Verses 37–38) It is a sarcastic question that asks whether or not they have a book and if their studies lead them to make a judgement that no logic or fair standard would accept. A book that tells them that those who submit to God and the guilty are treated in the same way is indeed a funny sort of book that seeks to please them and fan their desires. It provides them with whatever rulings they like. Needless to say, such a book has nothing to do with truth, reason, justice or human tradition.

"*Or have you received solemn oaths, binding on Us till the Day of Resurrection, that you will get whatever you yourselves decide?*" (Verse 39) If they do not have a book to rely on in their judgement, then they must have the alternative spelled out in this verse: a binding pledge by God that remains in force until the Day of Judgement, one to the effect that they will have whatever they decide. They may choose as they please. But this is not the case: they have no such oaths or pledges. How can they, then, assert their claims? On what basis do they make such claims?

"*Ask them which of them will vouch for this.*" (Verse 40) Who of them can pledge his word of honour that they have such an agreement with God, or that the pledges He has made them will remain in force until the Day of Judgement? This is again a sarcastic question that should place them in endless embarrassment.

"*Or have they partners? Let them produce their partners, if what they say is true.*" (Verse 41) They used to associate partners with God, but the *sūrah* makes these their own partners, not God's. It challenges them to invoke these partners if they believe that what they say is true. The question here is when will they invoke such partners? "*On the day when matters become so dire, they will be asked to prostrate themselves, but they will not be able to do so. Their eyes will be downcast, with ignominy overwhelming them. They were invited to prostrate themselves when they were safe.*" (Verses 42–43) The *sūrah* puts this scene before them as if

it is taking place at the moment of address. Thus, they are challenged to bring in their alleged partners, when this day appears as a reality, unattached in God's knowledge to a particular time. To put it before the addressees in this way gives it a very strong and profound effect. So, on the Day of Judgement, when matters are so dire and people are in great distress, these arrogant people will be asked to prostrate themselves, but they will be unable to do so, either because the time for this has lapsed, or because their bodies are so tense they will not respond. Be that as it may, the image here is one of extreme distress.

The *sūrah* continues painting their sorry picture: "*Their eyes will be downcast, with ignominy overwhelming them.*" (Verse 43) Such arrogant, tyrannical people with downcast eyes and overwhelming ignominy are shown in perfect contrast to the attitude they displayed in this life when they were extremely arrogant. This reminds us of the threat mentioned earlier in the *sūrah*: "*We shall brand him on the snout.*" (Verse 16) The impression of humiliation and ignominy is clear and deliberate. Yet in their humble position, enduring much humiliation, they are reminded of the arrogance that brought about this suffering: "*They were invited to prostrate themselves when they were safe.*" (Verse 43) When they were able to do it willingly, they arrogantly refused to prostrate themselves before God. Now, in the hereafter, when the life of this world is behind them, they wish they could respond to the invitation, but they cannot so prostrate themselves.

In their utterly dire situation, they face a stern warning: "*Therefore, leave to Me those who deny this revelation.*" (Verse 44) The warning shakes their very foundations. It is God Almighty who says to His Messenger that he should leave to Him those who deny His revelations. He will settle the matter with them. Who denies God's revelations other than such a weak, small creature devoid of all strength? Indeed, he is no more than a little ant, or a tiny particle. Nay, he is much less when he has to face the might of God, the All-Powerful. The Prophet is told to leave God alone with such a person and to go and rest with his fellow believers. That person's fight is not with the Prophet and the believers, but with God. He is God's enemy and God will deal with him. How terrifying! Who, then, would want to be an unbeliever! At the same time, how reassuring for the Prophet and the believers!

The Almighty then discloses the fighting plan against this little, weak creature: "*We shall bring them low, step by step, in ways beyond their knowledge. I will allow them more time: My scheme is truly firm.*" (Verses 44–45) These unbelievers and all dwellers on earth are too small and weak to warrant God making such a plan for them. God is only warning them so that they may save themselves before it is too late. They should realize that their apparent security is the trap they fall into. If God allows them time when they indulge in aggression and injustice and persist in error, this is merely to lead them on to their miserable end. They will thus carry their full burdens. They will come on that day burdened with sin, deserving all humiliation and ignominy.

Nothing is fairer or more merciful than a timely warning that places the outcome before them. God in His limitless glory offers His justice and mercy to His enemies and the enemies of His faith and Messenger. They are offered this warning when they still have the perfect chance to choose for themselves. All matters are laid bare. It is up to them.

God – limitless is He in His glory – gives chances, but He does not ignore anything. He allows an unjust tyrant respite, but then when He takes him, He does not let go. Here God speaks of the plan He in His wisdom has chosen. He tells His Messenger to leave those who deny His revelations to Him. They are the ones who take pride in their wealth, power, children and position. God will allow them respite, making all these favours their lure. He thus reassures His Messenger and warns His enemies. They are then left to consider their position.

The scene of the Day of Judgement, with all that it involves of stress and hardship, and the strong warning are followed with a continuation of the argument that wonders at their singular attitude: "*Do you [Prophet] demand a payment from them [and so they fear] that they would be burdened with debt?*" (Verse 46) Is it that you, Prophet, demand a hefty fee for providing guidance to them, and is it this fee that causes them to turn away and deny the divine faith, preferring to face such a miserable end? Could it be this or, "*Do they have knowledge of the hidden reality so that they can write it down?*" (Verse 47) Are they so certain of what is in store for them and, as a result, have no worry about it? Have they already written it down, or was it written according to what they wish? No answer is needed here. How, then, can they adopt such an attitude?

What Type of Fight?

A remarkable statement, "*Leave to Me those who deny this revelation,*" carries with it a terrible threat. It is then followed by an outline of the battle between God and His enemies. Together, the two statements make it clear that the Prophet and the believers have no part in the battle between faith and unfaith, truth and falsehood. This is indeed true, even though the Prophet and the believers may think that they have a genuine role to play in this battle. Whatever role they do play, when God so facilitates it for them, is only a part of God's will in His battle against His enemies. They are merely a tool, which God may or may not use. In either case, He does what He wants to do. In both cases, it is He who conducts the battle according to His laws ascertained as He chooses.

This statement was revealed when the Prophet and his followers were still in Makkah, a small minority unable to do much. Hence, it served as reassurance to those weak elements suffering persecution, and it struck fear in the hearts of those who thought they were powerful, having much at their disposal. In Madīnah, the situation completely changed. God willed then that the believers should play a prominent role in the battle. Yet at the same time, He also reiterated what He had said earlier, when they were in Makkah, weak and helpless. When they achieved their resounding victory at Badr, He said to them: "*It was not you who slew them, but it was God who slew them. When you threw [a handful of dust], it was not your act, but God's, so that He might put the believers through a fair test of His own making. Indeed, God hears all and knows all.*" (8: 17)

God wants this truth of the battle being His battle to be firmly understood by the believers. It is His issue and He settles it. When He assigns a role in it to the believers, it is only because He wants to put them to a fair test, for which they earn a good reward. As for the war itself, it is He who fights it, and it is He who assigns its victory. He is able to conduct this war without them. When they participate in it, they are one of the tools He uses, not the only tool. There are many Qur'ānic texts that assert this truth in all situations. It also fits well with the Islamic concept of God's will, rules and laws, as well as the nature

of human efforts made to accomplish God's will. These efforts are no more than a tool in God's hand.

This truth gives believers great reassurance in their two conditions of weakness and strength, provided they are sincere in their efforts, placing their trust in God when they fight for His cause. It is not their own power that ensures victory in the battle between truth and falsehood, faith and unfaith. It is God who ensures their victory. Their weakness does not lead to defeat because God's power supports them. God, however, may give respite to the unbelievers and lead them step by step. He determines events according to His will, wisdom, justice and mercy.

At the same time, this truth is bound to strike fear in the hearts of the enemy, whether the believers they are confronting are in a state of weakness or in a state of strength. Those believers are not the actual opponent. It is God who is conducting this war, with His own might. It is God who says to the Prophet to leave such miserable enemies to Him. It is He who leads them on step by step so that they fall into the fearful trap. Even if this enemy is equipped with all its strength, the same applies, because His power is indeed what sets the trap: "*I will allow them more time: My scheme is truly firm.*" (Verse 45) As for the timing of when all this will happen, this is something only God knows. Hence, no one should be deluded by a false sense of security. Only a transgressor allows such a false feeling to take hold of him.

The Value of Patience

Now the Prophet is directed to remain patient in adversity. He should persevere in his efforts to deliver his message, and face all obstacles including people's twisted minds, the harm they cause him and their denial of the truth. He must remain patient facing all this adversity until God judges as He pleases at the time of His choice. The Prophet is here reminded of the experience of a brother of his who lived in former times. That prophet was impatient and felt fed up with all the opposition. Had he not been granted God's grace, he would have been left in a state of disgrace:

So, await in patience your Lord's judgement; and do not be like the man in the whale who called out in distress. Had not grace from his Lord reached him, he would have been left upon that barren shore in a state of disgrace. His Lord, however, chose him and made him one of the righteous. (Verses 48–50)

The man in the whale was the Prophet Jonah, as mentioned in *Sūrah* 37. God reminds the Prophet Muḥammad, the last of all prophets, of Jonah's experience so that he can benefit by it. All prophets preceded Muḥammad and he, the one charged with delivering God's final message to all mankind, should benefit from all their experiences. His task is not to address a particular tribe, town or nation, but to put God's message to all communities and all generations. His example should provide guidance for them all. Thus he should set a code of living that remains suitable for all mankind's needs, in all situations and all conditions, despite the fact that every day brings something new.

The gist of Jonah's experience is that God sent him to the people of a town said to be Nineveh, near Mousil in today's Iraq. When they were slow in responding to his call, he was terribly upset. He left them in anger, thinking that God would not leave him to bear all the opposition those people presented. God would be kind to him and send him to others who would be less stubborn. In his distress, he went towards the coast where he took a boat. When they were far out at sea, the boat became shaky and seemed about to sink. It thus became necessary to throw someone overboard so as to reduce the load. They drew lots to choose that person. Jonah was the one, and they threw him overboard. Subsequently, a whale swallowed him. Finding himself in such terrible distress, in layers of darkness, inside the whale in the depths of the sea, Jonah appealed to God, saying: "*There is no deity other than You! Limitless are You in Your glory! I have done wrong indeed.*" (21: 87) God bestowed His grace on him and the whale threw him out, leaving him skinless on the shore. His skin had melted inside the whale. God preserved his life by His will, which is unrestricted by any law that is familiar or unfamiliar to man.

Here, in this *sūrah*, God says that had it not been for the grace He bestowed on him, Jonah would have been abandoned, disgraced by

God because of his lack of patience. He had acted on his own initiative, without waiting for God's permission. He was though only spared by God's grace. God accepted Jonah's repentance just as he demonstrated what deserves acceptance. Hence, God chose him and made him one of His righteous servants.

God reminds the Prophet Muḥammad of Jonah's experience in the whale so as to reassure him at a time he was facing stubborn rejection. This reminder comes after He has told him to leave the battle to Him, to conduct as He determines in the way He wishes. What the Prophet is required to do, is to remain patient in adversity and to await God's judgement as and when it comes.

The true hardship the advocates of the divine message face is that of remaining patient in adversity until God makes His judgement at the right time, as His wisdom dictates. Along the way they face many types of adversity such as accusations of lying, physical persecution, stubborn rejection, the apparent power of falsehood as it seems to be victorious, and the need to remain steadfast in the face of all this, reassured that God's promise will be fulfilled. They must not hesitate to travel along their charted way, no matter what hardship they have to face. This requires great effort, determination and patience, as well as support from God. As for the battle itself, God has determined its nature and willed to conduct it Himself. It is He who has decided to give the unbelievers time and to lead them step by step, for a purpose of His own. Thus did He promise His Messenger, and He fulfilled the promise in good time.

To All Mankind

The *sūrah* concludes with an image of the unbelievers as they received the Prophet's call. They are full of hatred and grudges shown in the way they look at him as though they want to do away with him. The Qur'ān gives the best description of their looks:

> *The unbelievers well-nigh trip you up with their eyes when they hear this reminder. They say, 'He is surely mad.'* (Verse 51)

Their looks almost affect the Prophet's feet so as to make him lose his balance and trip. It is a superb image describing the hatred embedded in these looks that boil with anger. Added to these hateful looks is their false allegation: "*They say: He is surely mad.*" (Verse 51) The image is taken from a scene of public address when the message is openly presented to people and they are called upon to accept it. It cannot be anywhere other than a public place where some of the most determined opponents are present, reacting with such looks that reflect a deep-seated hatred.

The final comment in the *sūrah* says: "*Yet it is but a reminder to all mankind.*" (Verse 52) Such a reminder cannot be presented by a madman. God tells the truth, while falsehood emanates from lying fabricators.

We conclude our commentary with highlighting the phrase '*to all mankind*', used at the end of the *sūrah*. We should remember that this revelation was Makkan, occurring in the early days of Islam, when the message was met with hard denial and the Prophet received such spiteful looks, when the unbelievers were fighting it with all their might. At this low ebb in its fortunes, the message of Islam declares its universal nature. Thus, its address to all mankind was in no way something it acquired later in Madīnah, when it achieved several victories, as some present-day fabricators allege. Right from its early days in Makkah, Islam declared its universal nature because this is part of its essence, right from its very first day. Thus did God will it to be and thus did He determine its direction from its early days. Thus will it remain until the end of time. God has willed it to be so, and He is its sponsor who protects and defends it. It is He who fights its battle against its opponents. As for its advocates, they only have to remain steadfast, patient in adversity until God, the best of judges, makes His judgement.